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ABSTRACT

Schools of choice are fast becoming part of the national debate on educational reform. This study, part of a larger study of schools and families, examined how the work context of teachers and opportunities for parent involvement differ under different choice arrangements, and investigated aspects of the sociobureaucratic context of teachers' work that have the greatest impact on opportunities for parent involvement and communication under different choice arrangements. The study focused on four sets of variables: parent choice arrangements, teacher work context, opportunities for parental involvement, and parent characteristics. Data were collected from 14 metropolitan high schools of choice--Catholic schools and single and multi-focused magnet public schools. To be included in the project, schools had to serve a large proportion of minority or low-income students. Data were collected through a teacher survey augmented by information provided by parents in a separate, parallel survey. Findings indicated that schools with a unified, focused mission, set in a context of caring, exerted a greater influence on parent involvement than either socioeconomic status, institutional instability, or bureaucratic functioning. Appendixes provide survey measures and scale construction. (Contains approximately 50 references.) (LL)

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TEACHER WORK CONTEXT AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOLS OF CHOICE: A VIEW FROM THE INSIDE

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ABSTRACT

Schools of choice are fast becoming a part of the national debate on educational reform. This study explores several organizational variables and the work context of teachers under three different types of school choice arrangements and their impact on the opportunities the schools provide for parent involvement. We draw our data from a national sample of Catholic, single-focus magnet and multi-focus magnet public urban high schools in three states. Our analyses center on two questions: (a) How do teacher work context and opportunities for parent involvement different under different choice arrangements? (2) What aspects of the sociobureaucratic context of teachers' work have the greatest impact on opportunities for parent involvement and communication under different choice arrangements? Schools with a unified, focused mission set in a context of caring, are key factors in parent involvement. They exert a greater influence than the family's socioeconomic status and despite institutional instability and bureaucratic functioning.

Introduction

How the socio-bureaucratic context of schools influences parent involvement under different types of choice arrangements is an interesting question for three reasons. First, schools of choice are fast becoming part of the national debate on school reform, in part, because they are thought to embody decentralized mechanisms of control enabling them to operate less bureaucratically than traditionally-organized public schools (e.g., Chubb & Moe, 1990). These schools differ in their organizational arrangements ranging from small, traditional Catholic and other religious schools to large public schools that offer multiple programs from which parents can choose to enroll their children.

Second, the research on parent involvement indicates that some types of parent involvement in their children's education is linked with school improvement. For example, when parents are involved in decision-making roles at the school, such involvement provides opportunities for parents to influence school improvement processes (e.g., Comer, 1980, 1984, 1988). This participation goes beyond fundraising and other more traditional and passive types of participation such as parent attendance at school meetings.

Lastly, a strategy thought to increase parent involvement is to promote school autonomy and participative governance structures under more communal, less bureaucratic conditions, especially as might be found in some types of schools of choice (Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990). Schools that can form more open relationships with parents, and thereby with the wider community, may be able to

capitalize on additional resources enabling them to fulfill their primary educational mission (Conley, 1993).

Indeed, beneath the rhetoric of school choice and parent involvement lies the argument that the growth of school bureaucracy and obtrusive government regulation has undermined the authority of teachers, blurred the responsibility of schools toward students and parents, depersonalized the interactions of schools and their clients, and deflected attention from the central task of teaching and learning (Elmore, 1990; Smith, 1993)). Thus, schools do not function today as well as they might. For schools to function effectively, the research literature suggests a restructuring approach broadly characterized as communal organization that emphasizes decentralized governance, focused purpose, and a sense of community (Bryk & Driscoll, 1988; Bryk, Lee, & Smith, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987; Hill, Foster, & Gendler, 1990). These components of school organization are widely perceived as exclusive properties of private schools (Bryk & Lee, 1992; Erickson, forthcoming), but are found in varying degrees in some public schools. School choice proponents would argue that by allowing parents to choose their children's school, a more communal organization of schooling based on parents' preferences and values would result.

Whether the socio-bureaucratic context of the school influences parent involvement is best viewed through the eyes of teachers. The views of teachers who are primarily responsible for the school's professional activity is key to this understanding.

Their assessment of the school may be more insightful than the assessment of administrators or supervisors because of ways in which bureaucratic functioning impacts their direct responsibility for the school's curriculum and teaching.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how socio-bureaucratic structures influence teachers' perceptions of the opportunities the school provides for parent involvement under different choice arrangements. Would less stringent bureaucratic conditions lead to increased parent involvement? Parent involvement is widely perceived as an indispensable component of school improvement and a necessary component of a communal organization of schooling. Specifically, we asked teachers in Catholic high schools, single-focus magnet public schools, and multi-focused magnet public schools their perceptions about the work context of their schools and districts, and sought to determine how this impacts on parental involvement and home-school communication in these schools.

Background

Schools, especially public schools, long have been viewed as bureaucratic institutions subject to regulatory norms and external constraints that are thought to account for their apparent sameness and imperviousness to change (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976).

However, schools are also social organizations defined by the interactions of those who work in them. The social organization of schooling varies enormously from school to school based to a large extent on teachers' attitudes, values, and shared perceptions.

These are conditioned by variations in structures, policies, and traditions (Bidwell & Kasarda, 1980) and by the composition of the student body. Lower socioeconomic settings generally do not report similar assessments of the school environment as do middle and upper-class settings (e.g., Anyon, 1981).

This means that teachers differ from setting to setting in their definition of school reality depending on how a school is organized including the characteristics of students who attend these schools. For example, social aspects of school organization having to do with how teachers interact with one another in the school may have a greater impact on home-school relations than how the school is bureaucratically governed and who attends them.

In their extensive review of the literature on the social organization of schools, Bryk, et al. (1990) note that there are two different orientations toward the structure of social relations within schools. The bureaucratic focus is primarily concerned with efficiency, organization, and formality in order to obtain primarily academic ends. In contrast, the communal or communitarian focus reflects an ongoing concern for the quality of human relationships, despite what other procedures may be in place to manage other aspects of schooling. It would seem that in this communal environment the school would be more open to parents who would be a welcome part of the school improvement process.

It is important to explore socio-bureaucratic dimensions of school organization in order to understand better how such aspects influence the kinds of opportunities schools provide for parent

involvement. In this study, then, we examine the context of teachers' work as one aspect of school organization that may influence parent involvement.

Toward a Communal View of School Organization

Various strands of research and the reforms they have inspired focus on numerous aspects of the context of teachers' work in efforts to identify factors associated with student outcomes. For example, the school effectiveness literature identifies five key factors: strong instructional leadership, a clear sense of school purpose, emphasis on basic skills, monitoring of academic accomplishments, and an orderly environment as workplace dimensions associated with student achievement (e.g., Edmonds, 1979).

Other researchers have focused on structural and organizational aspects of teachers' workplace. These include authority relations, supervisory arrangements, planning, leadership, and policy solutions (e.g., Louis & Miles, 1990) and on school governance, size, student body composition, and teacher workload (e.g., Corcoran, Walker & White, 1988; Metz, 1990). Still others have examined teachers' incentives and motivations which have prompted reforms such as merit pay and career ladders (e.g., Bacharach, Bauer & Shedd, 1986) as ways of improving student outcomes.

Yet another strand of research on aspects of teachers' work life focuses within the workplace examining teacher decision making, collegiality, opportunities for self-development, and a sense of congruence in carrying out one's goals (e.g., Cohn,

Kottkamp, McCloskey & Provenzo, 1987; Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988; Louis & Miles, 1990; Newman & Rutter, 1987). A review of the general literature on teacher work life (Johnson, 1990) provides considerable evidence that improving the quality of work life for teachers will affect their commitment, motivation, and in many cases, their productivity.

The most promising work to date (McLaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Rosenholtz, 1989) examines the quality of teachers' work life from the teachers' point of view suggesting the importance of a more normative approach to school organization, professional practice, and school reform. It provides critical insights into teachers' own values, attitudes, and perspectives. For example, teachers become dysfunctional and lose their idealism and motivation needed for work when they perceive a lack of administrative support (Dworkin, 1985; 1987), are overburdened with paperwork (Farber, 1982), or have little control over their destiny through external efforts to diminish their autonomy. Rosenholtz (1989) found that the most important factors in effective schools are leaders who create good conditions for teaching; the recruitment of talented teaching staffs; and the effort, commitment, and involvement of those staffs.

Increasingly the research evidence has shifted from the principal to the teacher as the locus for important instructional decisions (Goldring & Rallis, 1993). Likewise, reform efforts are beginning to move from policy contexts outside schools to reforms that are generated within schools.

An emphasis on teachers' attitudes and values, the desire for greater autonomy, and teachers' need for collegiality and administrative support suggest the importance of a communal view of school organization, describing the nature of the ideal workplace as a professional, caring community. Attention to the bureaucratic aspects of the social organization of schools stressed in earlier research (e.g., Bidwell, 1965; Coleman, 1961; Gordon, 1957; Waller, 1932) and its embodiment in the school effectiveness literature[1] may not be as helpful in framing school reform issues as communal aspects that highlight different topics for research and practice (e.g., Bryk, et al., 1990). A community metaphor of school organization draws attention to the norms, beliefs, collegial relations, shared goals, mutual obligations and support as critical for professional practice.

Parent Involvement and Communal School Organization

The literature on parent involvement links organizational effectiveness and student learning to various kinds of parent involvement reinforcing the appropriateness of the community metaphor of school organization. Many new school reform efforts include parent governance and participation components (Fruchter, Galletta & White, 1993). Parent norms, attitudes, and expectations influence the kinds of experiences students have in school (Baker & Stevenson, 1985; Epstein, 1985). Parent behaviors such as monitoring student homework, hiring tutors, and selecting students' programs have been shown to have strong positive effects on student outcomes (Henderson, 1987; Keith, Reimers, Fehrmann, Pottebaum &

Aubey, 1986; Raywid, 1985). Schools not only benefit through higher levels of student achievement, but community norms and values develop as parents become more involved.

For example, Epstein's (1986) research demonstrates that teachers who involve parents in school activities are more likely than others to be viewed positively by parents. These parents give higher ratings to teachers' interpersonal skills and professional abilities and express greater appreciation for teachers' efforts on behalf of their children. They also report greater confidence in the school's ability to provide a positive learning environment. These endorsements translate into stronger parental support of organizational aspects of school, namely, curriculum development, teacher benefits, and school funding.

It makes sense that schools that operate from a communal view of school organization, especially schools of choice, would want parents to be more involved in their schools even to the point of requiring some type of parent participation, despite the fact that such a requirement reflects bureaucratic decision making. Seeking to increase parent involvement may indicate a school's interest in providing parents with opportunities for participation, including dispensing information to parents, seeking parent advice, and contacting parents for various reasons. However, aspects other than bureaucratic decisions may impact opportunities for parent involvement, especially those that reflect a communal view of teacher work life within the school.

Parent involvement can be expected to vary under different

choice arrangements (i.e., Catholic, single-focus, multi-focus schools) due to differences in school governance structures. Catholic schools are thought to be less bureaucratically organized than public schools, more open to parent involvement, and provide parents and students with a greater sense of community (Bauch, forthcoming; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Coleman & Hoffer, 1987). Catholic schools seem to be particularly concerned with social relationships and a sense of caring (Kleinfeld, 1979; Lesko, 1988).

This paper attempts to demonstrate that the socio-bureaucratic elements of school organization, especially communal elements, which closely describe the contexts in which teachers work, have a strong influence on opportunities parents have to become involved in the school; and that these opportunities vary under different choice arrangements. In the debate over school choice and school improvement, the teacher work context, the school's provision of opportunities for involvement, and the cohesive organization of schools are important considerations if schools are to function successfully for the majority of their students.

Research Questions

This paper poses two research questions: (1) How do teacher work context and opportunities for parent involvement differ under different choice arrangements? (2) What aspects of the socio-bureaucratic context of teachers' work have the greatest impact on opportunities for parent involvement and communication?

Data and Methods

The study reported here is part of a larger study of schools

and families consisting of multiple data sources and field methods conducted in metropolitan high schools of choice located in Chicago's southside, northeast and central Washington, DC and environs (i.e., Prince George's County), and Chattanooga, Tennessee.[2] This study focuses on three types of schools of choice: Catholic, single-focus magnet, and multi-focus magnet public schools. To be included in the project, schools had to meet the following criteria: (1) serve a large proportion of minority or low-income students, (2) admit all or a portion of their students through choice and a formal application procedure, and (3) draw a large portion of students from urban areas. The teacher survey data reported here are augmented with information provided by parents in a separate, parallel survey (Goldring & Bauch, 1993).

This study examines fourteen high schools of choice: five Catholic, four single-focus, and five multi-focus. The five urban Catholic schools range in size from 325 to 750 students with an average of 12% of families with incomes below the poverty level. Two of the schools are private and three are diocesan. The two private schools serve 86% and 30% minority students, respectively. The diocesan schools serve 60% to 100% minority students, primarily African-American or Hispanic. The five Catholic schools enroll 100% of their student body in college preparatory programs. The diocesan high schools tend to be larger than the private schools and offer programs in college prep, business, and general education, although all students take an academic program.

The four single-focus magnet schools are organized

academically around a single theme and are among the smaller schools in the study. One focuses on arts and sciences serving 400 students of whom 42% are African-American. The second school focuses its programs around the agricultural sciences. It serves 240 students from primarily middle and upper-middle income families, of whom 67% are African-American and 22% are Hispanic. The third and fourth schools organize their curricular programs around academics and the performing arts, respectively. They both enroll 100% African-American students also primarily from middle- to upper-middle income families. In these four schools, approximately 10% of students come from families below the poverty level.

The five multi-focus magnet schools are large, comprehensive high schools organized primarily to achieve racial desegregation. They range in size from 2200 to 3400 students. These schools are highly complex in their organization offering a wide array of academic and vocational programs for neighborhood students including drop-out prevention programs, programs for the Gifted and Talented as well as one or more magnet programs for students whose parents choose the school. The magnet programs included in these schools seek to prepare students for careers in the visual and performing arts or to enter college with a preparation in science and technology, or language and international studies, or the humanities, respectively. While these schools are intended to bring about racial integration, only one serves a diversity of students of whom approximately 11% come from families below the

poverty level. The others serve predominately minority students of whom approximately 18% come from families below the poverty level. The population of magnet programs in these schools is far different from the general school population. They attract middle- and upper-middle class white students from across the city. Overall, only about 20% of a multi-focus magnet schools' population are enrolled in magnet programs.

Sample

All teachers assigned to academic teaching areas (i.e., math, English, science, social studies, and foreign language) were given questionnaires to complete and return anonymously in a sealed envelope to a central collection point at the school, usually located in a mailbox area or the teachers' lounge. Teachers also had the choice of mailing their completed surveys to the researchers, which a few in each school did. The overall teacher response rate was 50%. Single-focus public magnet schools had the highest response rate (68%) followed by Catholic schools (52%) and multi-focus schools (30%). Table 1 indicates some descriptive statistics including ethnicity, gender, educational level, and number of years serving in the school.[3]

(Table 1 here)

As can be noted in Table 1, teachers in Catholic schools are more likely white (84%) than those teaching in multi-focus magnet schools (64%); whereas single-focus magnet schools more nearly approach a balanced racial distribution employing 42% minority and 59% white teachers. Teachers in both types of public schools (71%

and 72%, respectively) have higher levels of educational attainment reporting master's degrees and beyond than teachers in Catholic schools (42%). Similarly, multi-focus magnet school teachers report nearly twice the number of years teaching in their schools (11 years) than single-focus (six years) and Catholic school (seven years) teachers.

To obtain parent data, in each school all twelfth grade students were given questionnaires to hand deliver to their parents and return in a sealed envelope to a central collection point at the school upon completion. In most cases, homeroom teachers served as the collection point for a particular group of students, while in other schools surveys were deposited in a designated area. The total parent response rate across all fourteen schools was 56%. Specifically, Catholic schools returned 60% of the delivered surveys, single-focus magnet schools and multi-focus magnet schools returned 52% and 42%, respectively. For this study, only parent income and ethnicity are reported and used as control variables in the subsequent analyses.[4]

The mean parent income reported by Catholic school parents is $53,326; for single-focus the mean drops to $47,549, and for multi-focus it drops to $43,105 indicating that Catholic schools parents have somewhat higher incomes than public school parents. Catholic schools also have fewer minority students (71%) compared to single-focus (81%) and multi-focus public schools (82%), although these differences are not vast.

Instrumentation

The initial parent survey for this research was based on questions used in previous surveys which examined relationships between parents and schools (Becher, 1984; Erickson & Kamin, 1980; Goodlad, 1983; Hess & Holloway, 1984; Horn & West, 1992; National Catholic Education Association, 1986). Revised versions of the original questionnaire were used in a series of studies which examined Catholic schools regionally and nationally (Bauch, 1988, 1993; Bauch & Small, 1986; Bauch, et al., 1985). Questions from the parent survey were adapted for the teacher survey and additional questions examining school organization and climate were added based on information gathered from previously-held site-visits and interviews of parents, students, and teachers. The teacher and parent surveys were subsequently piloted in Spring 1991 in public schools of choice as well as Catholic schools (Bauch & Cibulka, 1989). Based on these earlier analyses, final adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

Procedures and Variables

To study the relationship of teacher work context and opportunities for parent involvement under three different types of choice arrangements (i.e., Catholic, single-focus, multi-focus), we conducted regression analyses. The goal of these analyses is to determine whether aspects of teacher work context impact the extent to which schools provide opportunities for parental involvement; and whether certain choice arrangements seem to indicate more opportunities for parental involvement than others.

This study focuses on four sets of variables: parent choice

arrangements, teacher work context, opportunities for parental involvement, and parent characteristics. Parent choice arrangements are coded as dummy variables in the analysis: single-focus public schools versus Catholic schools, and multi-focus magnets versus Catholic schools. The survey items and scale construction used to define teacher work context and opportunities for parental involvement are located in Appendix A.

Teacher work context is measured by four variables. The first variable measures the extent to which teachers work in a supportive school environment (Alpha = .81. i.e., "The administration really seems to know what is happening in the school and what to do about it"). The second variable measures the level of school stability (Alpha = .67, i.e., "The school community is changing very rapidly"). The third variable measures the extent to which the teachers report they work in a caring atmosphere (Alpha = .68, i.e., "Teachers in this school really care about students"). These variables are measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The last variable indicates whether parent volunteering is required in the school. We consider this variable a context variable because it represents an aspect of the school's policy organization and attitude toward parents.

Teachers' reports about opportunities the school provides for parent involvement are measured by four variables. The first variable measures opportunities for parent involvement in 11 areas of school functioning (Alpha = .88, i.e., "attending meetings, serving as volunteers such as teacher aides and chaperons, helping

with fundraising and other events").

The second variable addresses the extent to which the school seeks advice from parents in 13 areas (Alpha = .90, i.e., "setting school goals, deciding discipline and other school policies, ways the school and parents work together"). The third variable measures the extent to which the school provides information to parents about seven different issues (Alpha = .77, i.e., "tips on helping with homework, providing information about course selection"). The fourth variable measures the extent to which teachers contact parents concerning seven instructional and behavioral components (Alpha = .85, i.e., "students' course selection, students track level, student misbehavior").

In addition, the analyses control for two variables that could account for differences in opportunities for parental involvement: income level of the parents and ethnicity. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations of all the variables aggregated to the school level in the analyses.

Results

The first section describes teacher work context under different choice arrangements. The second section presents the results of the analyses indicating the extent to which aspects of teacher work context impact on opportunities for parental involvement.

Teacher Work Context

The context of teachers' work varies with different choice arrangements (Table 2). Teachers in Catholic schools work with a

higher status clientele and fewer minority students than do teachers in single- or multi-focus magnet schools. Furthermore, teachers in Catholic schools (3.71) report that they work in more supportive school environments than do their counterparts in public schools of choice (3.37 for single-focus and 3.11 for multi-focus schools). For example, they indicate that their administrators "really seem to know what is happening in the school and what to do about it," that it is easy "in this school to get the information needed to make decisions," and that there are "constructive and collaborative relations between the administration and the teaching staff" more often in Catholic schools than in public magnet schools.

(Table 2)

Teachers in single-focus magnet schools (3.67) report that they work in more stable environments than do teachers in other schools (3.49 for Catholic and 3.31 for multi-focus schools). Multi-focus magnet schools seem to experience the most instability in terms of a changing school community, underfunding, student and faculty turnover, declining enrollment, and state and federal requirements. Similarly, single-focus magnet school teachers (4.16) also indicate that they work in very caring atmospheres, more so than teachers in Catholic schools (3.80) or multi-focus magnet schools (3.70). These teachers are more likely to indicate that their students enjoy school, and teachers care about students. Teachers in single-focus magnet (43%) and Catholic (33%) schools are more likely to perceive that the school requires parent

volunteering than are teachers in multi-focus magnet schools (9%).

According to the sample of teachers, the schools also differ in the opportunities they provide for their parents to be involved in different areas of schooling. Single-focus magnet teachers (4.01) indicate that their schools provide more opportunities for parental involvement than do teachers in the other types of schools of choice (3.54 for multi-focus magnet and 3.33 for Catholic schools). However, both single-focus (2.71) and multi-focus magnet school teachers (2.61) indicate that their schools solicit advice from parents more often than do teachers in Catholic schools (2.09), although all schools appear to infrequently solicit advice from parents. Based on teachers' perceptions, however, parents in public schools of choice are offered more opportunities to influence school decisions than parents in Catholic schools.

Single-focus magnet school teachers (3.62) report that their schools are more likely to provide parents with information about course selection and ways in which to help their children perform better in school, than Catholic (3.43) or multi-focus magnet schools (3.20). However, they do not seem to initiate the most contacts with parents. Multi-focus magnet teachers (3.33) initiate the most contacts with parents compared to single-focus (2.65) and Catholic schools (2.44).

In summary, multi-focus magnet schools appear to be at a disadvantage in the assessment of a quality work environment. Teachers in these schools perceive less administrative support and help, greater conflict, more regulations, lack of funding, and

student turnover thus characterizing them as bureaucratically organized (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Furthermore, they are less likely than teachers in Catholic and single-focus magnet schools to perceive the environment in which they work as caring. Legislating school volunteering in these schools is perceived by teachers as quite uncommon.

It should be kept in mind, however, that these schools serve larger and more diverse populations than do the Catholic and single-focus magnet schools, and they offer a wide array of curricular programming. Their superior number of school contacts may revolve around student misbehavior rather than providing parents with information or soliciting their advice which may be more likely at the smaller, more specified Catholic and single-focus schools. School size and diversity of student population are important factors in considering teacher work context and the need to initiate contacts with students' parents. It appears that smaller, single-focus public schools seem to experience a less bureaucratic environment than do the larger multi-focus magnet schools. They report working in a more caring atmosphere than either Catholic or multi-focus magnet school teachers. Teachers in single-focus schools, in fact, experience a working environment quite similar to a communal-type environment attributable to Catholic schools.

Teacher Work Context and Opportunities for Parent Involvement

The regression analyses indicate that both teacher work context and the type of choice arrangement are crucial predictors

of opportunities for parent involvement, usually more important than the impact of parents' social class.

(Table 3)

The first regression analysis examined the impact of teacher work context on opportunities for parent involvement. As expected, teachers working with higher-income parents indicate that their schools offer more opportunities for involvement than do teachers working with lower income parents (B = .13). However, controlling for parent income, the analysis indicates that teachers in both single-focus public schools and multi-focus schools indicate more opportunities for parent involvement than do teachers in Catholic schools (B = .20 and .27, respectively). Teachers who sense that they work in a caring environment (B = .29) and perceive the school as requiring parents to perform volunteer activities for the school (B = .25) also indicate that the school offers opportunities for parents to be involved. Overall, the results suggest that creating a caring environment and requiring parent volunteering seem to have a larger effect on promoting parent participation than does any one choice arrangement.

A similar picture emerges in the second regression analysis concerning school policy about soliciting advice from parents. Teachers working with lower-income parents indicate they work in schools that more frequently consult parents (B = -.23). Controlling for parent income, teachers in both single-focus and multi-focus public schools indicate that their schools seek parents' advice more than teachers in Catholic schools (B = .27,

and .37, respectively). In addition, teachers who report they work in a school context that is supportive (B = .16), caring (B = .26), and requires parents to perform volunteer activities (B = .14) also report more frequent soliciting of advice from parents.

The third regression analysis indicates that schools with higher-income families seem to provide their parents with more information (B = .12) than schools with lower income families. However, controlling for the effect of income, there is no impact of choice arrangement on the amount of information teachers perceive schools providing parents. What does seem to matter in providing parents with information is whether teachers work in a supportive (B = .26) and caring (B = .26) school environment. Requiring parents to perform volunteer activities does not have a significant effect on the amount of information schools provide parents.

Lastly, the amount of teacher-parent contact that is initiated by teachers is impacted by choice arrangement and a caring environment. Specifically, teachers initiate more contact with parents in multi-focus magnet schools than in Catholic schools (B = .42) and when they perceive they work in a caring environment (B = .17). The requirement of parent volunteering does not impact the extent to which teachers initiate contact with parents.

Across all the areas of opportunities for parental involvement, the regression analyses indicate that choice arrangement does have an important impact favoring public schools. Public schools of choice seem to offer more opportunities for

actual involvement and soliciting of advice from parents than do Catholic schools. As schools serving a broader and larger constituency, public schools may have more mechanisms in place that attempt to involve parents and communicate with them. Catholic schools, typically smaller than public schools, provide fewer in-school opportunities for involvement and may depend more on informal networks of communication such as church announcements and other community-based networks.

Furthermore, a supportive, caring work context also seems to impact on opportunities for parent involvement, while school stability is not related to any of the types of parent involvement we measured. Where schools maintain a caring work atmosphere, that caring manifests itself in reaching out to parents by finding ways to involve them, provide information, and communicate with them.

Interestingly, while requiring parent volunteering does have an impact on a range of parental involvement activities, it does not seem to influence the opportunity parents have to receive school information which teachers view the school as providing to parents, nor the frequency of teacher-initiated contacts with parents. It could be, especially in smaller schools, that teachers and administrators are in more direct contact with one another through parent volunteering thus mitigating the need for more formal channels of communication. In contrast, it could be that although a school may require parent involvement and provide opportunities for parent participation, home-school communication could be poor and information is not communicated. The most

obvious and important finding here is that where teachers perceive support from the school and they in turn really care about parents and students, despite family social status and school uncertainty and bureaucracy, it is more likely that parents will be involved and home-school communication occurs. This seems especially the case with respect to soliciting parent advice and providing parents with information.

Conclusion

This examination of teacher work context and opportunities for parent involvement under different choice arrangements sheds light on the nature of the relationship between the social organization of schools and parent involvement. First, it contributes to an understanding of how the professional community of the school influences parent involvement opportunities in schools of choice despite bureaucratic forces. Second, it also suggests that some choice plans may work better than others in reforming schools.

First, teachers in single-focus public magnet schools appear to work in a more caring environment than do teachers in Catholic and multi-focus magnet schools. They perceive their work settings as characterized by positive social relations, as places where teachers really care about students and parents and where administrators provide support for teachers. Public schools overall provide more opportunities for parents to be involved. Of interest, are the conditions under which public schools seem to provide more opportunities for parent involvement.

The results of this study suggest that a caring, supportive

work environment within the school is considerably more important than organizational factors impinging on the school from the outside including factors associated with school uncertainty such as a changing student population, underfunding, external conflict, and regulation. It is also more important than requiring parent involvement. In communal schools where teachers truly care about students and parents, there seems to be a greater readiness to provide parents with opportunities to be at school, solicit their advice, give information, and initiate contacts with them. Legislating parent involvement does not seem to be necessary.

Second, among the various choice plans investigated in this study, Catholic and multi-focus magnet public schools appear to provide fewer opportunities for parent involvement and have less caring environments. The single-focus public magnet schools in this study have an advantage when it comes to parents. They have superior social organizations possibly due to their more recent restructuring processes and lower levels of complexity made possible by being released from some of the bureaucratic formalities required in other public schools of the district, including the larger multi-purpose magnet schools that continue to enroll the majority of their students from the surrounding neighborhoods.

Implications for school restructuring suggest the importance of attending to the communal aspects of school reorganization if school improvement plans hope to provide greater opportunities for parent involvement.

1. See Purkey and Smith (1983) for a critical review of this research.

2. Data collected at each school site include participant observations, school documents, student transcript records, and interviews. Administrators, counselors, teachers, and students were interviewed at the school. Parents of participating students were interviewed by telephone.

3. While the response rate may raise some concerns, especially from teachers in multi-focus public schools, teacher characteristics of the sample population closely resemble those reported by school officials. In addition, it is important to note that returns from four of the five multi-focus magnet schools were evenly divided between the magnet or special-program teachers and nonmagnet teachers assuring representativeness across school programs. In the fourth school, 70% of teachers reported that they did not teach in a special or magnet program.

4. The correlation between income level and highest level of education of the respondent or spouse is rather high ($r = .49$); therefore, income was used in the analyses. This information was collected directly from the parents on the parent survey form and compared with school officials' population reports. School-by-school comparisons suggest that the parent sample is demographically representative of the whole.

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APPENDIX A

Survey Measures and Scale Construction

School Support

Question 27: Rate the extent to which you agree with each statement. (These statements are related to the environment of this school.)

Response: rate agreement on 5-point Likert scale

(6 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.81)

1. The administration really seems to know what is happening in the school and what to do about it.
2. There is substantial conflict over the school's educational mission and philosophy.
3. It is often very difficult in this school to get the information needed to make decisions.
4. The school has a history of very constructive and collaborative relations between the administration and the teaching staff.
5. The principal consistently gets excellent feedback about the impact of his or her decisions and actions.
6. It is almost impossible to keep up with all the changes in this school.

School Stability

Question 27: Rate the extent to which you agree with each statement. (These statements are related to the environment of this school.)

Response: rate agreement on 5-point Likert scale

(9 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.67)

1. Special interest groups use the school as a battle ground for pushing their own agenda.
2. The school community is changing very rapidly.
3. State and Federal requirements are always getting in the way.
4. The school is seriously underfunded.
5. Student turnover is very high in this school.
6. Student enrollment is declining.
7. The school is stifled by excessive rules and regulations.
8. Union/Management relations are a major source of tension and conflict in this school.
9. There is very high turnover among the professional staff.

Caring Atmosphere

Question 25: Rate the extent to which you agree with each statement concerning this school, its students, teachers, and parents.

Response: rate agreement on 5-point Likert scale

(3 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.68)

1. Teachers in this school really care about students.
2. Teachers in this school really care about parents.
3. Students enjoy this school.

Parental Involvement

Question 19: Does the school provide opportunities for parents to do any of the following at this school?

Response: rate frequency from "never" to "often" on 5-point Likert scale

(10 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.88)

1. Attend school meetings
2. Attend school wide parent-teacher conferences
3. Serve on a school committee or board
4. Organize/conduct fundraising activities
5. Participate in fundraising events
6. Serve as a school volunteer or chaperon
7. Attend an open house or back-to-school night
8. Attend school performances, socials, science or other fairs
9. Attend athletic events
10. Visit classrooms

Parent Advice

Question 10: Does the school seek advice from parents in making school decisions in the following areas?

Response: rate frequency on 5-point Likert scale

(11 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.90)

1. Hiring and firing of school staff
2. Setting school goals
3. Setting school policies for discipline
4. Setting admission policy
5. How the school budget is spent
6. What is taught
7. Setting academic standards

8. How students are graded
9. How money is raised
10. Ways the school and parents work together
11. How students are assigned to courses

Information

Question 8: Does the school or school system provide information to parents about the following?

Response: rate frequency from "never" to "often" on 5-point Likert scale

(5 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.77)

1. Available tutors who can be hired to work with their child, if necessary
2. Tips on helping with homework
3. Information about course selection
4. Information about whether courses are of low, medium, or high levels of difficulty
5. Specific information about helping their child

Teacher-Initiated Contact

Question 12: In your role at this school, how often did you contact parents about the following?

Response: rate frequency from "never" to "often" on 5-point Likert scale

(7 items; standardized scale; Alpha=.85)

1. Students' poor grades or academic performance
2. Students' course selection
3. Students' track level
4. Students' program placement
5. Student misbehavior in school
6. Student absence
7. Student tardiness

Table 1

Teacher Characteristics By School Choice Arrangement

	Catholic Schools		Single-Focus Magnet		Multi-Focus Magnet	
	%	N	%	N	%	N
Ethnicity						
Minority	16.1	14	41.5	27	36.0	58
White	83.9	73	58.5	38	64.0	103
Gender						
Male	57.5	50	37.7	26	39.2	65
Female	42.5	37	62.3	43	60.8	101
Educational Level						
B.A.	28.4	25	15.3	11	8.8	15
B.A. + 13	29.5	26	13.9	10	19.4	33
M.A.	21.6	19	33.3	24	32.9	56
M.A. + 15	19.3	17	33.3	24	33.5	57
Doctorate	1.1	1	4.2	3	5.3	9
	$\bar{X}$	(S.D)	$\bar{X}$	(S.D)	$\bar{X}$	(S.D.)
Seniority in Present School (Years)	6.61	7.13	5.65	5.06	11.30	7.98

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Analyses by Choice Arrangement

Variables	Catholic (N= 88) Mean	(S.D.)	Single-Focus Magnet SFM (N= 72) Mean	(S.D.)	Multi-Focus Magnet MFM (N=170) Mean	(S.D.)
Parent Characteristics						
Income	53,326	(17,536)	47,549	(16,423)	43,105	(16,554)
Race	.71	(.26)	.81	(.17)	.82	(.08)
Teacher Work Context						
School Support	3.71	(.77)	3.37	(.93)	3.11	(.76)
School Stability	3.49	(.75)	3.67	(.49)	3.31	(.58)
Caring Atmosphere	3.80	(.79)	4.16	(.57)	3.70	(.55)
Required Parent Volunteering	31.7%		42.6%		9.0%	
Opportunities for Parental Involvement						
Parental Involvement	3.33	(.88)	4.01	(.73)	3.54	(.67)
Parent Advice	2.09	(.68)	2.71	(.73)	2.61	(.82)
Information	3.43	(.67)	3.62	(.84)	3.20	(.74)
Teacher Initiated Contact	2.44	(.89)	2.65	(.74)	3.13	(.71)

Table 3

Standardized and Unstandardized Regression Coefficients [BOLD] and Standard Errors (in parentheses) of the Effects of Parent Background Characteristics, Choice Arrangement, and Teacher Work Context on Opportunities for Parent Involvement

Independent Variables	Opportunities for Parent Involvement			
	Involvement	Advice	Information	Contact
Parent Characteristics				
Income	.130**	-.230*	.122**	.021
	5.84×10^{6}	**-1.06×10^{5}**	**5.45×10^{6}**	**1.00×10^{6}**
	(2.69×10^{6})	(2.81×10^{6})	(2.79×10^{6})	(3.13×10^{6})
Race	-.099	-.036	-.051	.082
	-.452	**-.170**	**-.233**	**.402**
	(.294)	(.306)	(.304)	(.342)
Choice Arrangement				
SFM vs Catholic	.196*	.274*	.052	.048
	.366	**.527**	**.096**	**.096**
	(.125)	(.131)	(.129)	(.146)
MFM vs Catholic	.265*	.374*	.044	.420*
	.411	**.600**	**.069**	**.703**
	(.105)	(.110)	(.109)	(.122)
Teacher Work Context				
School Support	.113	.162*	.259*	.089
	.103	**.153**	**.236**	**.088**
	(.060)	(.063)	(.062)	(.070)
School Stability	-.008	-.064	-.100	-.094
	-.010	**-.084**	**-.127**	**-.129**
	(.081)	(.085)	(.084)	(.095)
Caring Atmosphere	.294*	.255*	.259*	.166*
	.361	**.323**	**.317**	**.219**
	(.076)	(.079)	(.079)	(.088)
Require Parent Volunteering	.250*	.144*	.088	.079
	.468	**.277**	**.165**	**.159**
	(.109)	(.114)	(.113)	(.127)
R^2	.29	.27	.22	.17

* $p<.01$
** $p<.05$